The World of Letters as Others See It

Are Canadian Authors Behind the Times?

THE lack of background in the Canadian novels that are being offered to the public was also the theme of a prominent literary man in the East who did not wish his name mentioned just yet. He asserted that in their literary conceptions and in their artistic inclinations too many of our writers are about thirty years behind the times. This gentleman's guess was that some young Slav or Hebrew living in Western Canada would come along and, presumably by virtue of a more subtle hereditary artistic instinct, write a real novel, going down to the very bones and marrow of human nature.—*By T. B. R. in Manitoba Free Press.*

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Mme. Bernhardt on Her Early French Rival.

REFERENCES have been numerous of late to admiration and praise alleged to have been lavished by Sarah Bernhardt upon the art of Marie Lloyd, and one press accepts them as a tribute to the English actress of that name who lately died. The Marie Lloyd to whom Sarah Bernhardt referred is a French actress who beat her for the Prize for Comedy at the Conservatoire in the '60s. The following is a description of her rival in a translation of the great French actress's own words: "She was tall, very tall, her narrow, white shoulders emerging modestly from her decollete robe, very decollete—without danger. Although very young, she had a greater womanly charm than any of us, . . . It was a prize of beauty that they awarded to Marie Lloyd! If the jury had been of good faith——"—*From The Saturday Review.*

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Is "Erik Dorn" More Real Than "The Newcomes"?

THE battle of the books goes merrily on. Already the longest battle on record, it may be expected to survive all our efforts to do away with wars. We may some day consent to settle disputes over boundaries without resorting to blows. But when it comes to deciding what the "real thing" is in literature we desire no pacifists to compose our differences. Begun as a fight over the Ancients and the Moderns, whether Homer and Virgil were greater than the writers of two centuries back, the battle has latterly gone through many phases: Is the novel a more effective instrument than the play? Is rhymed, metrical verse so shackled as to be impotent? Is the gutter more "real" than the drawing room? "Erik Dorn" than "The Newcomes?" Can romance go hand in hand with reality, or must the real be produced by a literal chronicle?—*From the Independent.*

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Little Portraits—Clemence Dane.

MISS CLEMENCE DANE, the author of "Will Shakespeare" and "The Bill of Divorcement" (and incidentally the most interesting and most successful contemporary woman dramatist), is tall and slim, with the attractive, well marked features that are the outward and visible sign of the determination to succeed. Her real name is Winifred Ashton, and I imagine that her pen name was borrowed from the famous church in the Strand. Miss Clemence Dane was for some time on the stage, and a few years ago she made a considerable success in a play called "Eliza Comes to Stay." Before she was an actress she was a school teacher, and in her first novel, "Regiment of Women," she exploited her school experiences. After "Regiment of Women" she wrote two more novels, and then with her first play, "The Bill of Divorcement," she won the right to be numbered among the few living dramatists who matter.—*From John o' London's Weekly.*

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Tchekov's Relation to the Sick World.

THE great artist is a reformer transformed. Shakespeare is sometimes held to have lived aloof from the reformer's temporary passions. But that repeated summons to reconciliation in his plays is the credo of a man who has plumbed the great secret of the liberalism of his time and equality of ours. Pity, tenderness, love, or whatever you choose to call it, is an essential ingredient of the greatest genius, whether in reform or in art. It is the absence of pity that is the final condemnation of most of the literature, painting and sculpture of our time. When pity is exhausted the best part of genius is exhausted, and there is little but cleverness left. In Tchekov more than in almost any author of recent years truth and tenderness are united. He tells us the truth even when it is most cruel, but he himself is kind. He often writes like a doctor going his rounds in a sick world. But he cares for the sick world. That is why his stories delight us as the synthetic golden syrup of more optimistic authors never does."—*By Robert Lynd in "Books and Authors."*

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The Late Father Vaughan's Thunderbolts.

I DID not know Father Vaughan, but his brother, the Cardinal, I met more than once. Sincerity, piety, physical beauty and fine manners were the marks of the Vaughan family, and the Cardinal combined these qualities with powers not purely intellectual, but compounded of insight and the kindred gift of managing men and making them work. These virtues, so catholic and so characteristic of the family, descended, I suppose, to Father Vaughan. But they seemed to have passed through a slightly coarser strain. No one would accuse Father Vaughan of want of candor. But he who combines the practice of dining with society and preaching at it is on a slippery slope. Did Mayfair really mind being railed at for its "sins"? I always found it extremely proud of them. So long as it had the means of carrying them on the statement of their wickedness (which the individual sinner passed on, if need be, to his neighbor), and the analysis of it, were not awakening but amusing. Therefore Father Vaughan's thunderbolts seemed to be mostly "duds." Those of the ascetic Manning hurt, for Manning wanted for his penitents a world as physically hard and as spiritually exacting as the one he lived in.—*From "A Wayfarer" in the Nation and the Athenaeum.*

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The Fungus in Our Literature.

THAT American Literature is still a stripling, unclothed and walking in its infantile crudity, has become a well worn complaint among our critics. But there is among us something far more menacing than healthy youth, however crude our youthfulness may be. There is among us a fungus; a fungus which has come to light through the recent growth of modernities and things called "ultra." There has been a sore in more than a few of the stripling bodies of American writers, and it is the sore that has produced the fungous growth. There is still a festered place on that sore which is not quite healed, but is seeking a healing, an escape, through the pains of still another disease. And this other disease is an outgrowth of the first; a symbol of its itching vagrance, a contagious seed of that sore. Its symptoms are: rigid isolation, an indifference to the real issues and the healthy mentality of our land, and even a cold denial of that health because it, in itself, can never hope to experience that exuberance again.—*From the Modern Review.*

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Is the War No Longer a Fit Subject?

WHOEVER he is, "A Rifleman" never showed more nerve than on the day he presented the manuscript of "Four Years on the Western Front" to the publishers, expecting them to do something more with it than push it back toward the drayman. And my respects to the Odhams Press! They did not push it back. They published it. It would do a tired journalist no good to try to picture what the document was like in manuscript. But in print its probable quarter of a million words make 400 pages demy octavo. The price is but 15 shillings. Such a quantity at that price, in these days, startles us as much as would a statesman in the act of keeping his word, or the remission of our income tax. It is unnatural. But so great a volume of matter for so low a figure is less startling than the detail that it concerns that war which to-day is one of the indelicate subjects forbidden to the ears of the well bred; the war which should be sheltered from nice people and left to where it now belongs, to taverns and to rude minds. It is hardly a fit subject even for print, except that harsh sort distasteful to the polite. Yet, in spite of the recent advice of gentle and wary editors and sensitive book-tasters, here is a publisher who issues without shame a huge book which revels in what is tabooed.—*By H. M. Tomlinson in The Athenaeum.*

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Maria Louisa a Queen of Comic Opera.

THERE are certain portraits by Goya which count among the most striking and unforgettable of the master's performances, and that is saying a great deal; there are a good many others which were painted essentially as a matter of routine and come as near being dull and commonplace as anything that flowed out of Goya's brush ever can. Speaking generally, one very interesting aspect of Goya's work as a portrait painter springs from its symptomatic value in disclosing the amazing *degringolade* which by that time had taken place in the world of the Spanish court and aristocracy, and which tells with all the greater effect since Goya in his methods of composition often deliberately revives memories of Velasquez. As portrayed on Goya's canvases, the contemporaries of the artist seem engaged upon one joint enterprise of giving a burlesque of the seventeenth century, with its all pervading solemnity and grandeur: the Queen of Charles IV., Maria Louisa, may assume the pose and copy the fashions of Philip IV.'s Donna Masiana: nothing can conceal from us the fact that she is but a Queen of comic opera.—*From "Goya as a Portrait Painter," by A. de Beruete y Moret, in the Athenaeum.*

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How Canadian Literature May Develop.

IT was interesting to see how the West was looked upon as the land of promise in which Canadian literature would develop most richly, and the opinion that it might be strongly influenced by Canadians not of Anglo-Saxon origin is interesting too, and also suggestive: the recognition being that the intellectual capacity of Canada is not going to be limited to the mental and spiritual heritage of Great Britain; but the idea that the Slav or the Latin can go further into the problems of life which furnish the subject matter of literature than the Anglo-Saxon is not very sound: the field is open to all, and race and nationality make little difference; the statement is really interesting because it directs attention to the fact that Canadian nationality has a complexity which is apt to be overlooked, and that Canadian art will lay tribute on sources far beyond the range of the Anglo-Saxon instinct and character.—*By T. B. R. in Manitoba Free Press.*

Chronicle and Comment

Continued from Page Four.

the Rue de Douai in Montmartre. The room, six flights up, with a trapdoor for a window, was furnished with two iron cots and very little else. The students used champagne bottles for ewers. For these quarters they paid 30 francs a month. No heat, of course, and in winter the cold was unspeakable. Although youth naturally predominated at Julian's some of the pupils were old men with gray hair, who had been there fifteen or twenty years. One day an Englishman, calling himself Vernon, turned up. He was about 55 years old, hollow cheeked, with sad eyes looking out from under great brows. He stayed about two months and after he left the students found out that he was no less a personage than Lord Dufferin.

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WHISTLER was a familiar figure at the Paris salons of those days, but it was in London that Simmons first met him. Whistler took the younger American painter to lunch at the Hogarth Club and then back to his studio to look at his work. A large manservant in full livery brought out the pictures for exhibition. He wore white gloves, and was careful not to touch the surface of the canvas. Of Whistler Simmons records: "His accent was very English and he was full of mannerisms, constantly fooling with his eyeglass or the lace at his throat. He asked about Paris, and I told him of the first show of the Impressionists, held on the Boulevard des Capucines; of Monet, Sisley, &c. The pictures had looked crazy to the people of the day. Whistler said: 'Oh, I know those fellows; they are a bunch of Johnnies who have seen my earlier work.'"

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A GLIMPSE of the poet of absinthe. "Verlaine sometimes came to this cafe (the Cafe des Lilas, on the Boulevard St. Martin)—Paul Verlaine. I often paid for his beer. A plain, hairy, dirty figure, seemingly physically very feeble; you would not think to look at him twice except to marvel at his ugliness and disorderly appearance unless you saw his eyes. If he looked at you you knew you were in the presence of your better. He was worshipped by all and they fought to pay his check, hovering about him like crows around dead carrion, waiting to snatch at anything that dropped from his lips I was not a good student of character in those days and in no way realized his importance, but I could not help feeling his charm."

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AN unfamiliar anecdote of Alfred de Musset, told to Simmons at Concarneau, the artist colony on the Breton coast, by Georges Pouchet, the ichthyologist. "The poet had many fads inherited from the days of swords, pistols, snuff and powdered hair. For instance, he would under no circumstances accept copper money; in fact, he would not touch the metal in any form. Towards the end of Musset's life he frequented a certain cafe in Paris; used it as a club. He would go there to write his letters, read his paper and, with him, there would be a quiet man in plain clothing. At a certain time in the evening he would make a gesture to the waiter, who would serve him with two carafons, one of brandy and one of absinthe. He would pour them together in one glass and, looking at them, take out of his buttonhole his button of general of the Legion of Honor and put it in his waistcoat. He would then down the mixture at once; the quiet man would take him to his carriage. No one but a Frenchman could have done this. He would not get drunk as a member of the Legion."

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THE leader of the Concarneau older set was Bastien Le Page. One day Simmons attempted to tell him the meaning of an American negro song, but he refused to listen. "No, Simmons, I do not wish to have it explained. I know what it says. It is a pathetic song of a lover mourning for one he has lost." Then he rendered it:

Ze lobstere in ze lobstere pot,
Ze blue fish in ze panne;
Zey suffere, oh, zey suffere not
What I suffere for my Marie Anne.

Naturally, discussion of Bastien Le Page leads to discussion of the woman who meant so much in his life, Marie Bashkirtseff. "Fresh from the hands of her maid, she was a fascinating blond 'vamp,' but in about twenty minutes the charms began to go. Her hair became unruly, buttons refused to do their duty and slipper strings burst. She had beautiful feet and was inclined to wear her shoes too small. I once sent her a message saying that I would give her a sketch for one of her slippers. She replied: 'I know the value of a new pair of slippers, but I do not know the value of one of your sketches.'"